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5.—*A Treatise on the Physiology and Pathology of the Ear; containing a Comparative View of its Structure, Functions, and various Diseases; Observations on the Derangement of the ganglionic Flexus of Nerves, as the Cause of many obscure Diseases of the Ear; together with Remarks on the Deaf and Dumb.* Sixth Edition. By JOHN HARRISON CURTIS, Esq., Aurist in Ordinary to his Majesty, &c., &c., &c., &c. London; Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, Paternoster Row. 1836. 8vo.

THIS is, on the whole, a useful book. The mere fact, that it has reached the sixth edition, speaks very distinctly in its favor. If it does not treat profoundly the various topics that come under notice, still the author is evidently a man of extensive experience, with a good talent for observation and a fair share of practical knowledge.

The subject of which it treats is one of deep interest. The diseases of the ear are so frequent, coming on often from very slight causes, sometimes without any known cause, and are so apt to terminate in partial or total deafness, that any thing that is calculated to throw light on the subject, cannot be regarded with indifference.

It is well known too, that when the function of hearing is impaired or destroyed, it is exceedingly difficult to restore it. It is therefore very desirable to understand those diseases that lead to its destruction, to learn, if possible, the means by which they can be arrested, and at any rate to be able to distinguish between those that produce only a temporary deafness and those that cause a permanent loss of the function.

Many persons are of opinion, that this department of surgical knowledge has not kept pace with some others; that the diseases of the eye, for example, are much better understood than formerly; that many affections, that once terminated in the loss of sight, are now within the control of art; that vision is in many cases, at the present day, easily restored, where a cure would formerly have been thought impossible; but that nothing of this kind has taken place with regard to the diseases of the ear.

To a certain extent this is true. A great improvement has unquestionably been made in what is termed ophthalmic surgery, while it cannot be denied that not a few of the diseases of the organ of hearing wholly baffle the art. But this should not be attributed altogether to a neglect of the subject; the difficulty in fact lies deeper. The loss of hearing very often arises from

the state of the internal ear or the brain; and in most of such cases, all that science can do is to teach the fact, without furnishing a remedy. Very many of the diseases of the organ of sight, on the contrary, are situated in the eye itself, the brain and optic nerve being unaffected, and not a few of these produce partial or total loss of vision. It fortunately happens that many of these cases are within the reach of art, and by a delicate, though not a very difficult operation, the functions of the eye may be restored. But a small proportion, on the other hand, of those diseases of the ear which terminate in deafness, are situated in the external organ, and a few only of these are in the present state of knowledge within our control.

It is probable that the mere loss of hearing is not so great a privation as the loss of sight; yet we know that the deaf are ordinarily far less cheerful and happy than the blind. This can perhaps be accounted for by the fact, that the loss of hearing is more frequently in consequence of a diseased state of the brain, than the loss of sight. Another circumstance also seems to favor this opinion; and that is, that insane persons are very often deaf, while the sense of sight is rarely affected in them.

Even when deafness is the consequence of some defect in the external organs, it is not very often that it can be removed by any human means, and still less often by a surgical operation; differing essentially, in this respect, from the diseases of the eye.

It is well known that the loss of hearing sometimes arises from an obstruction of the Eustachian tube, the canal which runs from the back part of the throat to the cavity of the tympanum. Through this canal the air passes from the mouth, the membrane of the tympanum is in this way kept tense, and consequently vibrates better when sounds strike upon it. The air is occasionally prevented by colds in the head, as they are called, and other inflammatory affections about the throat, from passing through this canal, and so long as the passage is obstructed, the sense of hearing is rendered more or less imperfect. In some cases this obstruction is permanent and complete, and in such cases permanent deafness is the consequence.

From a knowledge of the fact, that the membrane of the tympanum may be ruptured, and the sense of hearing remain unimpaired, Sir Astley Cooper was led to suggest and practise an operation, in cases of deafness arising from an obstruction of the Eustachian tube, that for a time promised very favorable results. The operation was very simple; the membrane was merely punctured by some small sharp-pointed instrument like a couching-needle. The air was in this way admitted to the cavity of the tympanum, and the tension of the membrane thus

restored. In some cases, there was for a time great apparent relief from the operation; the patients actually heard better, or thought they did; but the good effects were not found to be permanent, and it is now almost altogether abandoned. We are surprised to perceive, that Mr. Curtis entertains so favorable an opinion of it; we doubt whether he will find many to agree with him. We have, however, alluded to this operation, because it promised as much as almost any one for the relief of deafness, that has ever been suggested, and because it is now usually regarded as an entire failure. It shows that much has not been accomplished by surgical operations for the restoration of hearing.

Mr. Curtis's book can be easily understood by most persons. It is not burdened with technical language, and would perhaps even be more interesting to general readers than to professional ones. It will be useful to all classes, by making them perceive the importance of early attention to the first indications of impaired hearing, for this it very properly inculcates. Its plan is judicious. It first describes the organ of hearing and its healthy functions in man, and after giving an account of those organs in some of the inferior animals, it proceeds to an examination of the diseases.

We are pleased to see the increased attention that is bestowed upon this subject, and are desirous that it should still more occupy the thoughts of scientific professional men. On this account we should be glad to have Mr. Curtis's book very generally circulated; not because it is precisely the work we could wish, but because we know of no other, that is, on the whole, to be preferred to it. At any rate it presents the points that require investigation, if it does not always suggest the best mode of conducting it; and thus, is likely to induce observation and excite inquiry that may lead to very important results.

6. — *Poems*, by OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES. Boston; Otis, Broaders, & Co. 12mo. pp. 163.

WE have seldom had more genuine enjoyment in the course of our critical labors, than in examining this unpretending little book. In these days, we look with some dismay upon a volume of poems, especially if it be a little one: they are apt to exhibit a remarkable economy of the material, and a prodigal use of the washes and varnishes by which the want of it is supplied. "Things of eve" and "things of morn," with various other creatures of equivocal generation, have figured in such pages,